

## Unit 3: Foundational Beliefs

### Objectives

At the end of this unit, you will

### Be aware of the following

- Helpful principles when studying beliefs other than one's own
- Essential Jewish beliefs
- Common misunderstandings experienced by Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths
- Basic Orthodox Eastern Christian beliefs
- Foundational beliefs uniting Muslims
- Five 'pillars' of Islam
- Sacredness of the Qur'an

### Identify

- Shema
- Torah
- Coptic Orthodox
- Shahada
- Salat
- Sawm
- Zakat
- Hajj
- Sura
- Jibril
- Jinns
- Abraham and Moses
- Mahdi
- Divine Decree
- Jihad
- Lesser Jihad
- Greater Jihad

## Realize

- Variety within Orthodox Eastern Christian Churches
- Importance of Arabic recitation of the Qur'an
- Status of Prophet-Messengers within Islam
- Necessity of complete understanding of Islam

## Unit 3: Foundational Beliefs

Three underlying principles assist us before discussing foundational beliefs.

1. Treat other religions with respect. "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."
2. Maintain your own spiritual/personal foundation.

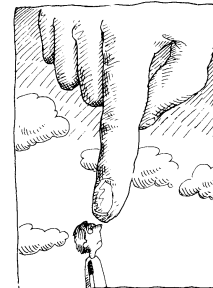
*"I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any...Mine is not a religion of the prison-house."*

-- Mahatama Gandhi (as quoted in All Men Are Brothers, Mahatama Gandhi [NY: UNESCO, Colombia Universty Press, 1958], p. 156)

*"As the traveler who has once been from home is wiser than he [she] who has never left his own doorstep, so a knowledge of one other culture should sharpen our ability to scrutinize more steadily, to appreciate more lovingly, our own."*

-- Margaret Mead (as quoted in Bartlett's Familiar Quotations, [Boston: Little, Brown, 1991], p. 853)

3. Realize the difference between what is normative and what is actually practiced (ideal/real; belief/practice). What people believe--the ideals of their religion--may often be very different from what is actually practiced.



Core ideas and texts form the basis for understanding a given faith's relation to society.

## Unit 3: Foundational Beliefs

Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all religions of the book.

They look to the scriptures--whether the Torah (TOH-rah) and Hebrew books of the Bible, the Bible (including the New Testament), or the Qur'an--as a primary source for understanding. Developed from these scriptures, the following beliefs summarize major teachings of these three faith traditions.



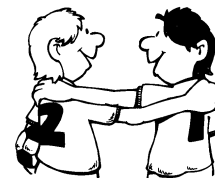
### I. Judaism



## 1. Foundational Beliefs

**a. Monotheism** The Shema (shuh MAH), "Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, The Lord is One," summarizes the most fundamental characteristic of God. The Torah (law) expresses God's concern for all.

### b. Covenant



The agreement God made with Abraham established Abraham's descendants as the chosen people.

*"Judaism has a 3000-year-old tradition of infusing the spiritual into our everyday lives, not for personal redemption, but to uplift the lot of [humankind] through adherence to ethical and moral principles, and to preserve through this common endeavor a sense of connectedness with a people. This, the essence of our Covenant, gives us tools to deal with the disparate and often confusing aspects of modern life."*

-- Alfred Moses, U.S. Ambassador to Romania  
(as quoted in the American Jewish Committee advertisement, New York Times, 8 Sep 1996, p. E-18)

**c. Torah** Originally referring to the Pentateuch or five books of Moses, the term gradually included the whole of the Hebrew scriptures. By the end of the fifth and sixth centuries, the Torah became synonymous with anything which is authoritative as God's will for Israel.

Supplements to the Torah are oral traditions Mishnah (meesh-NAH) and the Talmud (tahl-MOOD), and interpretations of the scriptures, the Midrash (mee-DRAHSH). Torah thus encompasses particular rituals, universal ethical statutes, and ultimately includes knowledge of redemption/salvation.

**d. Land** God's eternal covenant made with Abraham spoke to the significance of the promised land of Palestine.

*"The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God." (Genesis 17:8.)*



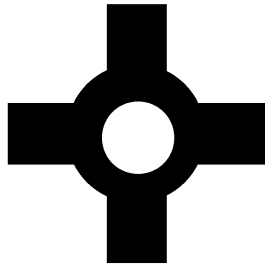
Many Jewish people closely identify with Jerusalem and the present day land of Israel, attesting to the enduring importance of this country to their thought and practice.

## 2. Common Misunderstandings

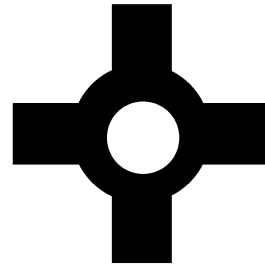
**a. Christian Speculations** Though Jewish and Christian adherents enjoy a common history, the meanings of their shared religious vocabulary are not necessarily the same. Terms such as covenant, law, mercy, righteousness, messiah, salvation, heaven and hell may connote radically different meanings within the two traditions.

**b. Jesus** Jewish opinions concerning Jesus vary. Though not the Messiah, many accept him as a great teacher.

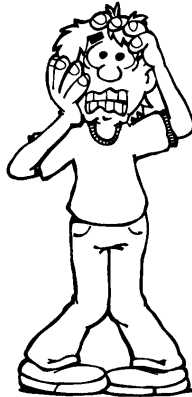
**c. Subtle Anti-Semitism** It is too easy for discriminatory and stereotyped language to characterize Jewish-Christian discussions. Interpretations of New Testament passages also can easily project negative images on all Jewish people.



## II. Christianity



In the Middle East, many Arab Christians are of the Orthodox, Eastern Rite persuasion. Rather than following the Pope in Rome, Orthodox practitioners support patriarchs who are independent church heads. They see their church traditions as continuing unchanged from earliest New Testament times.



The following discussion, though appearing technical and detailed, attempts to explain specific differences appearing in Middle East Christian circles. Theologians, church historians and practitioners differ concerning precise descriptions of these churches.

**1. Monophysites** One of the early councils of the church, the Chalcedon Council of 451 A.D., defined Christ's nature as both human and divine. Monophysites, a Greek term for "one nature", disagreed with this position, claiming Christ had only one nature--divine. Four main churches adhere to the monophysite path--the Assyrian Church of the East, Coptic Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Ethiopian, and Armenian.

**a. The Assyrian Church of the East** This group is often called the East Syrian Church or Nestorian after their first bishop. During the Middle Ages, these Christians were prominent throughout the Persian empire in the early Middle Ages. They spread through parts of India and China by the seventh century. Small remnants still survive in Iraq, Iran, and the United States.

**b. Armenian Orthodox** Though dispersed throughout the world, this church is active in Lebanon today.

**c. Coptic Orthodox** Located in Egypt and parts of Ethiopia, Coptic practitioners believe their founder to be St. Mark the Evangelist, first bishop of Alexandria. Today, the head of this six million member church is titled "Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark."



As with many other Middle East Christian churches...Local priests may marry but bishops and higher church officials come from celibate monastic ranks.

**d. Syrian Orthodox** Also referred to as the West Syrian Church or Jacobites after their sixth century bishop, these Christians consider the Patriarch of Antioch in Damascus to be their spiritual leader. Adherents conduct worship in Syrian, and make the sign of the cross with one finger, symbolizing their monophysite beliefs.

**2. Other Christian Groups** Two other groups complicate the Middle East Christian religious picture. Uniates (YOO nee-it)--Eastern Rite Catholics--accept papal authority in Rome, thus being "reunited" with the Roman Catholic Church. Greek Catholics, Melchites, (MEL-kits), Syrian, and Chaldean Catholics, and Catholic Copts make up these groups.



## Unit 3: Foundational Beliefs

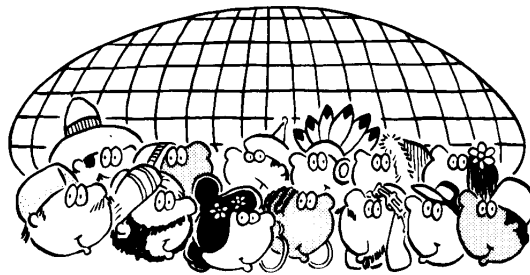
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Marionites form one of the largest Arab Christian churches in the Middle East, with over one million practitioners present in Lebanon. As many as 6.5 million have emigrated from the Middle East. These churches claim they never left the Roman Catholic fold. While using a Syriac church ceremony, most of their worship is in Arabic.

Less than 300,000 Protestants reside in the Middle East, being primarily the result of Presbyterian and Anglican missionary efforts.

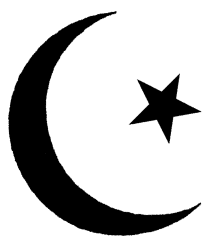
### 3. Common Misunderstandings

**Variety** Recognize the diversity of belief and practice, even within Christian circles, in the Middle East.

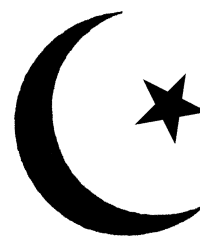


Orthodox churches are not just another branch of the Roman Catholic tradition. Each group has cultural and theological distinctions which set it apart from others.

Interactions with Middle Eastern Christians benefit from awareness of these distinguishing traits.



## III. Islam



**1. The Five Pillars** Five foundational faith expressions unite all Muslims:

**a. Shahada**(sha-HAHD-ah, witnessing) This is the essential creed of Muslim belief. It is repeatedly invoked as part of daily prayer. The shahada states:



*"There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God."*

When said with heartfelt intention before two official witnesses, this testimony initiates a person into the Islamic community.



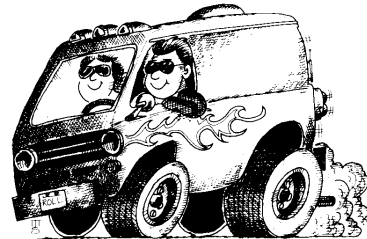
**b. Salat** (shul-LAHT, prayers)

Five times each day, Muslims pray in Arabic. Salat consists mainly of verses from the Qur'an, praises to God, and requests for guidance. Adherents bow toward the Kaabah in Mecca when praying.

**c. Sawm** (SOO-uhm, fasting) During the month of Ramadan, thanksgiving is expressed, discipline shown, and communal solidarity and reconciliation affirmed. Practitioners abstain from food and drink from dawn to sunset.

**d. Zakat** (SA-kat, almsgiving) The faithful demonstrate tangible worship by giving a kind of loan to God of from two to ten percent of one's income, payable at year's end. Charitable causes receive support in more spontaneous manners, as needs arise.

**e. Hajj** (al-HAHJ, pilgrimage) At least once in a lifetime, preferably during the twelfth month of the calendar, a Muslim takes a trip to Mecca. No one goes on Hajj without first ensuring that family members are provided for in their absence.



## 2. Basic Beliefs

Essential Muslim beliefs cluster around the following headings.

**a. God** The Qur'an narrates: *"God is One, the eternal God. He begot none, nor was he begotten. None is equal to Him."* (Sura 112 [Sura 'SOO ruh,' being a chapter of the Qur'an].)

The "uncomplicated absoluteness of God" found in the Qur'an sets Islam apart from rival belief systems.

Life is a unified whole under the one God. No sacred/secular division occurs. Humankind is created in the image of God with His imprint upon the very substance of their souls.

**b. Angels** An active belief in angels permeates the Islamic world and life view. *Jibril* (jib-REEL, Gabriel), who delivered the Qur'an, is the most important angel. Other invisible beings *jinns*, who possess extraordinary powers, are capable of either good or evil.

### c. Revealed Books

Moses, David, Jesus, and Muhammad all transmitted literally the respective books dictated to them--the Torah, Psalms, Gospel, and Qur'an. While all are authoritative, the Qur'an--due to its accuracy of text, breadth of scope, and manner of transmission--in practice is Islam's primary book.



**d. Qur'an** The Qur'an, the text from on high, is the word of God. *"The literature and fine arts of all Muslim people spring from this fountainhead [the Qur'an]...No man seeking to live in the same world as Islam can afford to regard lightly, or to judge ignorantly, the book that is called The [Qur'an]."* (Arberry, The Holy Qur'an as quoted in Cragg, Readings in the Qur'an, p. 51.)

Everything about the Qur'an is sacred--its sounds, words, letters, even parchment, and paper. Verses of the Qur'an are the first sounds a new child hears and the last a dying person listens to.

The art of chanting the Qur'an, the supreme sacred act of Islam, can move a Muslim to tears.

To capture the full beauty of the Qur'an, one must hear it recited in its original Arabic. Protestant scholar Kenneth Cragg writes:



*"Translations do not convey the emotion, the fervor, the mystery the Qur'an holds in the original."*

*Reading the Book in the quiet of the study, perusing it with the eye, silences the force of the text which properly belongs with the ear and the soul...* (Readings in the Qur'an, p. 31.)

The Qur'an is a prophetic discourse, not written chronologically, meant to be consumed rather than subjected to scientific examination. Its style is of the powerful, expansive imagery of Middle East culture. Obedience is its final goal.

*"...like a pearl for which the diver must plunge to break the shell which both ensures and conceals the treasure...the Qur'an...yields itself only to those who rightly understand."* (Cragg., pp. 14, 16.)

Each of the 114 Suras begins, "In the name of God, compassionate, all merciful." The total text, divided into thirty parts, allows for daily readings/recitations of one part for each day of the lunar month.

As the Suras begin with the longest to the shortest, and the latter ones are more event/subject descriptive, new readers are advised to begin at the back and work their way forward.

#### e. Prophet-Messengers



The biblical figures, plus some unknown Arabian messengers, are seen as ambassadors (rusul--prophets with a specific mission who bring the word) of God. **Muhammad** (muh-HAHM-mad), the last of the prophets, is the only one who proclaims a universal message.

**Abraham and Moses** are the greatest of the Prophet-Messengers. The phrase "peace be upon them" is often written after their names. Muhammad, though not divine, receives highest respect. The phrase "prayer and peace be upon him" is often said or written after Muhammad's name.

**f. Last Things** Bodily resurrection, judgment, paradise, and hell are the climax of history. Hell is not eternal for the believer, as Muhammad will intercede for those possessing even an atom of faith. Millennial leaders (**Mahdi**, MAH-dee) will defeat enemies of religion at the end of history, establishing peace and justice upon the earth.

### g. Divine Decree

This belief that everything is decided by God and in some sense comes from Him, articulates a major source of personal contentment and sustainment, especially in times of difficulty.

Drawing from Sura 37:96 ("*...God who created you and all that you have made...*") this decree elaborates the all-powerful nature of God.

**h. Jihad** (ji-HAD) Sometimes seen as a sixth foundational element of Islam, Western media stereotypes it as "holy war."



A more accurate portrayal sees jihad as an exertion or struggle in achieving the ways of God. It (jihad) describes an attentiveness against distractions from God, exertion to do His will within ourselves, and reestablishing order in Islamic society and the world at large.

Lesser jihad describes just war--taking up arms (guns, swords, bombs, and tanks) in both offensive and defensive postures. Greater jihad is the struggle against inward passions but also includes work to overcome underdevelopment, counteract propaganda, or offer cultural resistance to secularization influences.

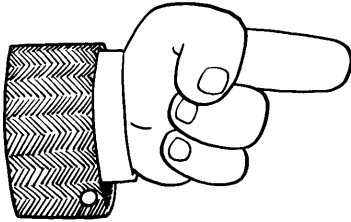
## 3. Common Misunderstandings

**a. Diversity** Islam is not monolithic--practiced the same in all countries. Each society must be examined for itself.

**b. Jihad** Only rarely in Islamic history has jihad meant conversion by the sword.

**c. Terrorism** Western media reports often leads us to assume that all devout Muslims favor terrorism. This is definitely not the case.

After discussing misperceptions and negative treatments of Arab and Muslim peoples, editors of the HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion present the challenge...



*"There is a need for more nuanced understanding of the increasing amount of information, much of it still inaccurate, about Islam."*

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*Speaking and writing responsibly about Islam is a task facing students and teachers, reporters in the print and broadcast media, government officials..."*  
*(HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion, pp. 498, 500.)*

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## Vocabulary List: Foundational Beliefs

**Abraham and Moses** The greatest of the Prophet-Messengers.  
The phrase "peace be upon them" is often written after their names.

**Coptic Orthodox** Located in Egypt and parts of Ethiopia, Coptic practitioners believe their founder to be St. Mark the Evangelist, first bishop of Alexandria.

**Divine Decree** Belief that everything is decided by God and in some sense comes from Him.

**Greater jihad** The struggle against inward passions but also includes work to overcome underdevelopment, counteract propaganda, or offering cultural resistance to secularization influences.

**Hajj** (al-HAHJ--Pilgrimage) At least once in a lifetime, preferably during the 12th month of the calendar, a Muslim takes a trip to Mecca. No one goes on Hajj without first ensuring that family members are provided for in their absence.

**Jibril** (jib-REEL), (Gabriel) Most important angel in Islam.  
Delivered the Qur'an.

**Jihad** (ji-HAD) Sometimes seen as a sixth foundational element of Islam, Western media stereotypes it as *holy war*. A more accurate portrayal sees jihad as an exertion or struggle in achieving the ways of God. It (jihad) describes an attentiveness against distractions from God, exertion to do His will within ourselves, and reestablishing order in Islamic society and the world at large.

**Jinns** Invisible beings who possess extraordinary powers, being capable of either good or evil

**Lesser jihad** Describes just war--taking up arms in offensive and defensive postures

**Mahdi** (MAH-dee) Millennial leaders who will defeat enemies of Islamic religion at the end of history, establishing peace and justice upon the earth.

**Salat** (shul-LAHT--prayers) Five times each day, Muslims pray in Arabic. Salat consists mainly of verses from the Qur'an, praises to God, and requests for guidance. Adherents bow toward the Kaabah in Mecca when praying.

**Sawm** (SOO-uhm--fasting) During the month of Ramadan, thanksgiving is expressed, discipline shown, and communal solidarity and reconciliation affirmed. Practitioners abstain from food and drink from dawn to sunset.

**Shahada** (sha-HAHD-ah--witnessing) This is the essential creed of Muslim belief. It is repeatedly invoked as part of daily prayer. The shahada states, "There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God."

**Shema** (shuh-MAH) The call--"Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, The Lord is One," which summarizes the most fundamental characteristic of God within Jewish thought.

**Sura** (SOO-ruh) A chapter of the Qur'an

**Torah** (TOH-rah) Law. Encompasses the whole of the Jewish scriptures

**Zakat** (ZA-kat)--almsgiving The faithful demonstrate tangible worship by giving a kind of loan to God of from two to ten percent of one's income, payable at year's end. Charitable causes receive support in more spontaneous manners, as needs arise.



## Review Quiz: Foundational Beliefs



### Part 1--Matching

Place the correct letter in the space provided.

- |                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. _____ Sura               | A. The struggle against inward passions but also includes work to overcome underdevelopment, counteract propaganda, or offering cultural resistance to secularization influences. |
| 2. _____ Mahdi              |   |
| 3. _____ Salat              |   |
| 4. _____ Hajj               | B. Describes legal war--both offensive and defensive.   |
| 5. _____ Lesser jihad       |   |
| 6. _____ Shema              | C. According to Islam, the greatest of the Prophet-Messengers. The phrase "peace be upon them" is often written after their names.  |
| 7. _____ Coptic Orthodox    |   |
| 8. _____ Jibril (Gabriel)   | D. Located in Egypt and parts of Ethiopia, Coptic practitioners believe their founder to be St. Mark the Evangelist, first bishop of Alexandria.                                  |
| 9. _____ Greater jihad      |   |
| 10. _____ Abraham and Moses | E. Belief that everything is decided by God and in some sense comes from Him.   |
| 11. _____ Shahada           |   |
| 12. _____ Zakat             | F. At least once in a lifetime, preferably during the 12th month of the calendar, a Muslim takes a trip to Mecca.   |
| 13. _____ Torah             |   |
| 14. _____ Jinns             | G. Most important angel in Islam. Delivered the Qur'an.   |
| 15. _____ Jihad             |   |
| 16. _____ Sawm              | H. Sometimes seen as a sixth foundational element of Islam, Western media stereotypes it as holy war. A more accurate portrayal sees  |
| 17. _____ Divine Decree     |   |

it as an exertion or struggle in achieving the ways of God.

- I. Invisible beings who possess extraordinary powers, being capable of either good or evil.
  - J. Millennial leaders who will defeat enemies of Islamic religion at the end of history, establishing peace and justice upon the earth.
  - K. Five times each day, Muslims pray in Arabic. Salat consists mainly of verses from the Qur'an, praises to God, and requests for guidance.
  - L. During the month of Ramadan, thanksgiving is expressed, discipline shown, and communal solidarity and reconciliation affirmed. Practitioners abstain from food and drink from dawn to sunset.
  - M. This is the essential creed of Muslim belief. It is repeatedly invoked as part of daily prayer.
  - N. The call--"Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, The Lord is One," which summarizes the most fundamental characteristic of God within Jewish thought.
  - O. A chapter of the Qur'an.
  - P. Law. Encompasses the whole of the Jewish scriptures.
  - Q. The faithful demonstrate tangible worship by giving a kind of loan to God of from two to ten percent of one's income, payable at year's end.
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## Part 2--Matching

Place the correct letter in the blank provided.



- |                  |               |
|------------------|---------------|
| 1. _____ Sawm    | A. Gabriel    |
| 2. _____ Hajj    | B. Witnessing |
| 3. _____ Shahada | C. Almsgiving |
| 4. _____ Salat   | D. Fasting    |
| 5. _____ Zakat   | E. Prayers    |
| 6. _____ Jibril  | F. Pilgrimage |

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## Part 3--Multiple Choice

Place the letter of the most correct response in the blank provided.



1. \_\_\_\_\_ Judaism, \_\_\_\_\_, and Islam are all religions of the Book.
- A. Buddhism  
B. Hinduism  
C. Christianity
2. \_\_\_\_\_ According to the unit, when dealing with foundational beliefs of religion, it is important to realize
- A. the difference between belief and practice.  
B. how wrong religions other than our own can be.  
C. that we must fire up our own beliefs and practices.

### Unit 3: Foundational Beliefs

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3. \_\_\_\_\_ In order to promote harmony and sensitivity to others, what is a good practice to employ?

- A. Fight fire with fire.
- B. Confront, correct and point out wayward errors of thought.
- C. Treat other religions with respect.

4. \_\_\_\_\_ Alfred Moses, U.S. Ambassador to Romania, includes which of the following in his summary of the Jewish covenant?

- A. Judaism seeks to uplift all humankind through adherence to moral and ethical principles.
- B. Judaism applies to the House of Israel alone.
- C. The concept of covenant is outdated and no longer valid.

5. \_\_\_\_\_ What best expresses the aspirations of many Jewish people concerning the land of Palestine?

- A. "The whole land of Canaan...I [God] will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you."
- B. America is the new Jerusalem.
- C. The Torah applies only to ancient peoples.

6. \_\_\_\_\_ In the Middle East, many Arab Christians are of what distinct church persuasion?

- A. Baptist and Methodist
- B. Orthodox, Eastern Rite
- C. Pentecostal

7. \_\_\_\_\_ Many monophysite church adherents make the sign of the cross with only one finger because

- A. they like the "right on...one way" symbolism.
- B. this sign symbolizes their belief in the one, divine nature of Christ.

8. \_\_\_\_\_ The Coptic Orthodox church is located primarily in which countries?

- A. Libya and the Sudan
- B. Turkey
- C. Egypt and parts of Ethiopia/Eritrea

9. \_\_\_\_\_ Coptic Orthodox church members believe their founder to be
- A. King David.
  - B. St. Mark the Evangelist.
  - C. Ramses II.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ What phrase often follows the written name of Muhammad in Islamic texts?
- A. Praise be upon him.
  - B. The holy, the compassionate.
  - C. Prayer and praise be upon him.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ According to Islam, the greatest of the prophetic--messengers are
- A. David and Jonathan.
  - B. Abraham and Moses.
  - C. Solomon and John the Baptist.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ According to Muslims, what best describes the term jihad?
- A. Holy war
  - B. Exertion or struggle in achieving the ways of God
13. \_\_\_\_\_ Within the Coptic Church local priests
- A. may marry but higher officials are celibate.
  - B. are celibate as well as higher officials.
  - C. may marry as can higher officials.
14. \_\_\_\_\_ When praying, Muslims bow
- A. towards the dome of the rock in Jerusalem.
  - B. towards the Kaabah in Mecca.
  - C. only when convenient.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ According to Muslims, Moses, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and Muhammad all transmitted the respective books dictated to them--being the Torah, Psalms, Gospels, and Qur'an.
- A. Ezekiel, Maccabees
  - B. David, Jesus
  - C. Abraham, John the Baptist

16. \_\_\_\_\_ Literature, fine arts, legal and theological matters of all Muslim people spring from
- A. the Qur'an.
  - B. the Hadith.
  - C. the council of twelve.
17. \_\_\_\_\_ A 'Sura' is
- A. a chapter of the Qur'an.
  - B. a book of sayings attributed to Muhammad.



## Part 4--True or False

Place a *T* or an *F* in the blank.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Middle East Protestant Christians come primarily from Presbyterian and Anglican mission efforts.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Middle East Christian belief and practice is monolithic, with little variety or breadth.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ The Shahada, "There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God", is the essential creed of Muslim belief.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Muslims who are able, must make the Hajj to Mecca once every five years.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ The Islamic world view has no room for the angelic presence.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ To capture the full beauty of the Qur'an, a good English translation is the best source.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Translations of the Qur'an convey the emotion, fervor, and mystery possessed by the original Arabic.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ The Qur'an is written in a chronological, narrative style.

9. \_\_\_\_\_ According to Islam, Muhammad is the last of the prophets.



"Have a Party"

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## Resources for Further Study



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